

# Rockensies

(continued from page 1)

mobility and coordination.

The symptoms started out subtly. As a 28-year-old nursing instructor at City University of New York, Mrs. Rockensies first noticed a minor loss of balance.

"I was having a conference before class with some students and one girl asked me why I was doing that. When I asked what she pointed out that I was hanging onto the chair next to me. I didn't even realize I did that," she said. "Also, I started to walk next to the wall in hallways. I developed visual disturbances and my eyesight would become blurry."

This was a difficult and unsure time for her. "I was teaching, happy and was getting married at 28 years old," she said. "(After the symptoms started) I had reservations about getting married. I knew I might be in a wheelchair and didn't want to put that on someone."

But, Kenneth, now her husband of 28 years, said he did not care if they had two weeks together or 20 years. He was going to be there no matter what.

In the midst of her early symptoms, before there was a definite diagnosis of MS, a doctor advised Mrs. Rockensies not to have children. "There wasn't any decision to have one, two or three kids. I don't consider myself a saint, but I do have faith. My husband and I had tremendous faith that if the good Lord wanted us to have children he would provide a way for them," she said.

The Rockensies have three children; Kevin, 27; Patricia, 25; and Regina, 21. Kevin and Regina currently live in Shavertown and Patricia lives in Boston.

"Just because a doctor says to you, 'Don't have children,' isn't the end all be all," she said. "There is a higher being who will be the deciding factor. If I had never had children, where would I be today?"

Mrs. Rockensies said her children, "give her a reason to keep going and to look at the disease as a disease, just another problem in life that has to be dealt with."

Although she describes the early years with her children as some of the best, they were also difficult. Her legs were getting weaker and walking was sometimes difficult. Falls were becoming more common and Mrs. Rockensies found herself pulling back.

"My life had changed. You find

*"Maybe a disease will prevent us from something physically, but not mentally."*

**Eileen Rockensies**  
Shavertown

yourself falling down and you have infants. I started having little fender benders and had to stop driving because my perception was off. It was a rough day when I decided not to renew my driver's license. It was something else being taken away from me," she said.

"I couldn't help thinking about how MS would affect my children. I found myself not going to first communions and school plays. I didn't want to fall and make a scene. There are many things I deprived myself of and I regret that," she said.

But, her children do not think there is anything to regret. In later years they would assure her that although she could not make it to the actual event, she was there every day preparing for it with them.

And she was not alone in raising the kids. Mr. Rockensies, who was a full professor at City University of New York, had a schedule that allowed him to come home and help during key hours, such as when the children returned from school.

"He's been phenomenal. He's been tremendously supportive and encouraging," Mrs. Rockensies said of her husband. Mr. Rockensies currently teaches at College Misericordia. The family moved to Shavertown four years ago from New York City.

Open lines of communication were established early on in the Rockensies home. Even though the questions were sometimes heartbreaking, they were all answered honestly.

"The kids would ask if I was going to die. I said 'I don't plan on it.' But, I felt bad, like I had instilled that fear in them," she said. "We discussed all their questions openly. It would've been terrible if I had shut them out on anything. You have to have communication when there is an illness."

Regina, her youngest, said MS was never an issue in the household. "She had MS way before I was born. It was something that was normal for our house," said Regina, who graduated from Col-

lege Misericordia and is currently looking at graduate programs.

"I think we all had to grow up a little faster because we had more responsibilities. She made sure we knew how to do more for ourselves. I never thought it odd until someone pointed it out from the outside."

For Regina, her mom has been a great source of strength and a tangible role model. "She is a wonderful mom and the best listener I've ever met. She's really an inspiration to me," explained Regina, as she helped prepare dinner for the family.

"She was always there when we got home from school to talk to us. She's the anchor of the family."

Mrs. Rockensies is very proud of her three children, not only their accomplishments, but their character. Kevin is getting a second master's degree, Patricia is teaching at a private school in Boston and Regina performs in local theater and is pursuing graduate school.

"Each one is sensitive to others' needs and feelings. They are very compassionate people and I attribute it to the fact they had to deal with a horrible situation," said Mrs. Rockensies. "Some people might ask how could she bring kids into the world. But, my kids educate me on how my illness has been the impetus to help them be the compassionate human beings they are. They learned early on that life is not always easy and fair."

Regina said her mom taught her that the more you give, the more good will come back.

Mrs. Rockensies practices what she preaches. She spends a lot of time volunteering for Sr. Sponsa Beltran, who runs a missionary in war-torn Liberia, West Africa, and who is fighting to feed, clothe and physically rehabilitate hundreds of abandoned children.

Recently she received a call from Sr. Sponsa informing her that there are many children whose legs were amputated and who need artificial limbs. So, Mrs. Rockensies got on the phone and eventually found a man in Illinois who collects limbs for children

and is sending 300 limbs to Sr. Sponsa.

"How she accomplishes some of this stuff is amazing," said Kevin, the oldest. "It's incredible what she can do. If I tried to call people they'd probably hang up on me, but she finds someone who is sending 300 prosthetics to Sr. Sponsa. It's amazing," he said.

"Volunteering is a way of fulfillment. If I'm not able to work as a mother and the kids start leaving, there is a void. I needed something to fill that void," said Mrs. Rockensies.

Kevin thinks his mom's volunteering is great. "I don't know how she finds all these new projects," he said.

Mrs. Rockensies found Sr. Sponsa in an interesting way. They attended College Misericordia together in the mid-1960's, then went on their separate ways in life. Thirty years later, the Rockensies moved to Shavertown, started attending St. Therese's, and learned of Sr. Sponsa's connection with the church.

"They are constantly writing letters back and forth," said Kevin. Rev. Peter Crynes of St. Therese's said, "She is tireless with good intentions and very committed to everything she does." He describes her relationship with Sr. Sponsa as "a beautiful reconnection."

Mrs. Rockensies also helps make lap robes for senior citizens, the McCauley House and hospices. People can pick up yarn at St. Therese's, knit a square and drop it back at the church and then she will sew them together and send them where they are needed.

"Here in the Back Mountain I know there are a lot of people confined to their homes. My advice is to reach out," she said. "Maybe a disease will prevent us from something physically, but not mentally."

*"How she accomplishes some of this stuff is amazing. It's incredible what she can do."*

**Kevin Rockensies**  
Eileen's son



Ronald Bartizek, editor of The Dallas Post, holds the first-place plaque for headline writing, won in the state press awards contest.

## Post headlines accurate, appealing, judge says

Ronald Bartizek, editor of The Dallas Post, was awarded first place in the headline writing category in the Keystone Press Awards contest, sponsored by the Pennsylvania Newspaper Publishers' Association Foundation and the Pennsylvania Society of Newspaper Editors.

Entries consisted of three headlines written in 1997. Bartizek chose "In confessing, youths tell plot to torch school," for a story about an attempt by some Dallas High School students to burn down the school; "United Water customers want pressure up before prices," for a story about a

proposed rate increase for customers of the utility; "Math's no problem for Preece, students," for a story about Dallas High School mathematics teacher Charles Preece.

"Your headlines are accurate, appealing and tell the stories well," wrote the contest judge, from the Hoosier Press Association in Indiana. She suggested the headlines would be even better if they had "a little attitude."

In addition to the award for the Post, Chad Sebring, editor of The Abington Journal, the Post's sister paper, won first place in the sports photo category.

## Space for flea market now available

The United Methodist Women of the Trucksville United Methodist Church will sponsor their fifth annual "Flea Market on the Lawn" on Aug. 1, from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. There are still spaces available at \$10 a space (bring your own table). Anyone wishing to reserve a space may do so by calling the church office, 696-3897 between the hours of 8 a.m. and noon or by calling Barbara Glowach, 696-1093 or Evelyn Roberts, 675-7107. The United Methodist Women will serve lunch beginning at 11 a.m.

All monies earned from these projects support the many missions supported by the Trucksville United Methodist Women, local, national and global.

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